

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 02605 251013Z

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 EB-07 NSCE-00 INRE-00 SSO-00 /052 W

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O 250915Z MAR 75 ZFF4

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3483

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

SEC AIR FORCE WASHDC IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY OLSO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 02605

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MASS, BE

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT

REF: BRUSSELS 2606

1. ON MARCH 24 I SAW PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS AND MADE A FULL PRESENTATION OF THE REASONS WHY BELGIUM SHOULD ACQUIRE THE F-16 IN ADDITION TO RUNNING THROUGH THE MILITARY AND ECONOMIC FACTORS FAVORING THE F-16, I TOLD TINDEMANS THAT AMERICANS WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND IF A NATO ALLY FAILED TO CHOOSE THE BEST PERFORMING PLANCE WHEN THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR BELGIUM WERE SO SUBSTANTIAL. I GAVE TINDEMANS THE PAPER THAT WAS TRANSMITTED TO WASHINGTON IN THE REFTEL.

2. TINDEMANS HAD THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS:

A. BELGIUM SHOULD BUY THE BEST PLANE. HE DID NOT FAVOR ACQUIRING A SECOND BEST AIRCRAFT EVEN IF IT COULD SATISFY NATO REQUIREMENTS. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THERE HAD BEEN SO LITTLE CONSIDERATION OF THIS VITAL POINT IN BELGIUM. FOR EXAMPLE, HE SAID THAT THE PAPER OF THE BELGIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY SAID VERY LITTLE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRUSSE 02605 251013Z

ABOUT THE COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE CAPABILITIES OF THE

F-16 AND THE F-1 BUT DISCUSSED RELATIVE ECONOMIC BENEFITS AT GREAT LENGTH. (TINDEMANS RECEIVED THIS PAPER AND THE REPORT OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM ONLY A WEEK AGO.)

B. HE ASKED HOW THE F-16 WOULD STAND UP TO SOVIET FIGHTERS. WE ANSWERED THAT THE F-16 WAS SUPERIOR TO CURRENT SOVIET FIGHTERS BY A WIDE MARGIN AND HAD BEEN DESIGNED TO COUNTER THE SOVIET FIGHTERS THAT WERE EXPECTED TO BE INTRODUCED IN THE 1980S.

C. TINDEMANS STRESSED THAT IT WOULD BE POLITICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR BELGIUM TO BUY A DIFFERENT PLANE THAN THE OTHER THREE COUNTRIES. HE FAVORED A COMMON CHOICE AND INSISTED THAT THE BELGIAN SELECTION WOULD HAVE TO BE THE SAME AS AT LEAST ONE OTHER OF THE FOUR CONSORTIUM COUNTRIES.

D. TINDEMANS SAID THAT IT HAD BEEN AGREED THAT THE PRIME MINISTERS OF THE FOUR CONSORTIUM COUNTRIES WOULD MAKE THE FINAL DECISION. HE SAID THAT HE HAD OVERRULED VANDEN BOEYNANTS ON THIS POINT.

E. TINDEMAANS ALSO OVERRULED VANDEN BOEYNANTS ON THE PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED IN BELGIUM. VANDEN BOEYNANTS HAD WANTED THE GOVERNMENT TO CONDUCT A PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND INVITE THE INTERESTED INDUSTRIAL AND LABOR GROUPS TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS. TINDEMANS SAID THAT, CONSIDERING DESSAULT'S OWNERSHIP OF SABCA AND THE PRO-FRENCH LEANINGS IN WALLONIA, THIS PROCEDURE WAS UNACCEPTABLE. HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD MAKE A DECISION AND THEN DEFEND IT.

F. TINDEMANS SHOOK HIS HEAD ABOUT VANDEN BOEYNANTS' APPROACH; HE SAID VANDEN BOEYNANTS WAS ALWAYS DEFENDING A POSITION, NOT EXAMINING A PROBLEM.

G. ACCORDING TO TINDEMANS, THE QUESTION OF WHICH PLANE TO BUY WAS BECOMING A COMMUNITY ISSUE, WITH THE WALLONS FAVORING THE FRENCH AND THE FLEMISH FAVORING THE AMERICAN PLANE.

3. ACTION REQUESTED: PLEASE SEND US A SHORT, CLASSIFIED PAPER COMPARING THE PERFORMANCE OF THE F-16 WITH THE BEST CURRENT SOVIET FIGHTERS AND THE FIGHTERS WE EXPECT THE USSR TO INTRODUCE IN THE NEXT 20 YEARS. WE WOULD GIVE IT TO TINDEMANS AND SEVERAL OTHER MINISTERS. THE EARLIER

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRUSSE 02605 251013Z

IT IS RECEIVED THE MORE USEFUL IT WOULD BE. FIRESTONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, MILITARY PROCUREMENT, AIRCRAFT SALES, MILITARY POLICIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BRUSSE02605
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750103-0837
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750319/aaaaarav.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BRUSSELS 2606
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <16 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: F-104 REPLACEMENT
TAGS: MASS, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006